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**DELEGATION OF NORWAY**

The 38th Session of the General Conference of UNESCO

**Intervention by Torbjørn Røe Isaksen**

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***Check against delivery***

President of the General Conference, Director General, Colleagues – Ladies and Gentlemen  
Considerable progress has been made in the world in the past few decades. Never before have so many people enjoyed such high standards of living or benefited from so much cooperation. (The number of children out of school has almost been halved during the last 15 years, more people can read and write, and in 4 out of 6 regions, girls and young women outnumber boys at universities.)

At the same time, the past few years have taught us that we cannot simply assume that progress will continue, which only serves to underline the need for a well-functioning UN.

But there are dark clouds in the horizon. Not since World War II have so many people been forced to flee from their countries and homes.

We have all been witnesses to the horrible destructions of cultural treasures that belong to us all. Norway commends UNESCO's work in putting this high on the international agenda including in the Security Council. Norway also strongly supports the campaign #Unite4Heritage.

We need the UN like never before. To succeed the UN needs to adapt to a world that is facing new challenges. UNESCO, like other members of the UN-family, has to undergo a continuous process of reform if it is to retain its relevance in a rapidly changing world.

Norway would like to see a modern and result-oriented UNESCO that works in close cooperation with the other UN organisations, funds and programmes, and that prioritises based on its comparative advantages. We believe the organisation has made steps in the right direction in this respect. However, continued reforms are needed in the years to come.

Member States should give strategic direction to these reforms and hold the Secretariat accountable for conducting its work in a transparent and efficient manner. At the same time, we wish to avoid time-consuming micromanagement and to ensure that the UNESCO secretariat gets sufficient space and financial resources to carry out its duties and achieve expected results.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Norway puts education first. We are in the process of doubling Norway's development assistance for

education. In particular, we want to strengthen girls' education, the quality of learning, vocational and technical training, and education in emergencies and protracted crises.

The provision of education is a national responsibility. Mobilisation of domestic resources is key. However, ODA remains a necessary addition, particularly in the least developed and most fragile countries.

The Oslo Summit on Education for Development resulted in a high-level *Commission on the Financing of Global Education Opportunities*. The purpose is to explore and invigorate the case for investment in education and bring about a reversal of the current underfunding. The commission has been welcomed by the UN Secretary-General, who has also stated that he will act on its recommendations.

It is an urgent challenge to reach the growing number of children and adolescents who are out of school in countries affected by emergencies and protracted crises. Additional resources must be mobilised for this purpose, both as part of humanitarian responses and in terms of longer term investments in resilient education systems.

Furthermore, we need to do what we can to protect education from attacks. In the end of May, Norway hosted a Safe schools conference. The main objective was for countries to sign the Safe Schools Declaration, including the Guidelines for Protecting Schools and Universities from military use in armed conflicts. As we speak 49 states have endorsed the Declaration, and we are hoping for many more.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me mention another, but perhaps not entirely different challenge related to education. We live in an era where people are on the move – either forced or voluntarily. I am confident that it will benefit individuals, students, academics and not least countries, if we were to develop a global instrument for just, fair and transparent recognition of their qualifications, making use of their resources and competencies. The development of a Global Convention for Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications responds to this need. Norway strongly supports this initiative.

The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda is ambitious, comprehensive and universal. It will be our navigational star for the next 15 years, including here at UNESCO.

As a coastal state investing heavily in research on how the oceans influence our climate and environment, we are pleased for the role given to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commissions in the 2030 Agenda and within UNESCO. It is a recognition of the global trust in IOC and confidence in its ability to deliver.

UNESCO also has a vital role in promoting access to information and press freedom. We will continue to prioritize the work on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. World leaders adopted the

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in September this year. It includes a commitment to public access to information. The target, SDG16.10, states plainly that all countries pledge to: "*ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements*". This new commitment has potentially transformative implications for the free flow of information and independent media development worldwide.

Thank you!